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19. 39. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 21, including positioning a releasable suture clamp on each of the first and second gripping means, and clamping the suture with the releasable suture clamp during an initial auto threading of a new lead of suture through the apparatus.

REMARKS

Reconsideration of this application, as amended, is respectfully requested. Initially, Applicants would like to thank the Examiner for the indication that claims 21-39 contain allowable subject matter.

In the Official Action, the Examiner rejects claims 21-39 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention.

With regard to claim 21, line 6, the Examiner argues that "apparatus" is unclear and suggests that --an-- be inserted before "apparatus. In response, line 6 of claim 21 has been amended to insert -an-- before "apparatus". As such, it is clear that "an apparatus" refers to the apparatus for carrying out the recited steps.

With regard to claim 21, line 20, the Examiner argues that "said at least one longitudinal member" lacks antecedent basis and suggests that "said at least one" be changed to --at least one of said-- or the like. In response, line 20 of claim 21 has been amended to change "said at least one longitudinal member" to --at least one of said first and second longitudinal members--.

With regard to claim 21, line 27, the Examiner argues that "suture" is vague and suggests that --the-- be inserted before "suture". In response, "suture" has been changed to --said indefinite length suture--.

With regard to claim 21, line 32, the Examiner argues that "the tipping step" and "the cutter step" lack antecedent basis. In response, "the tipping step" has been changed to --the heating step-- and "the cutter step" has been changed to --the cutting step--. The remaining claims have also been amended, where necessary, to change "tipping" to --heating--.

With regard to claim 31, lines 4-5, the Examiner argues that "the cutter means" lacks antecedent basis. In response, "the cutter means" has been changed to --a cutter means ... for cutting said indefinite length suture--.

With regard to claims 32-35, line 2, the Examiner argues that the recitation "positioning the tipping step" is vague and indefinite as to what is being set forth. In response, "positioning the tipping step" has been changed to --positioning the suture for heating--.

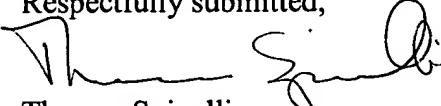
With regard to claim 39, line 4, the Examiner argues that the recitation "a releasable suture clamp" is vague and indefinite as to whether it refers to that set forth in line 2 or to another such clamp. In response, the second recitation of "a releasable suture clamp" has been changed to --the releasable suture clamp--.

In view of the above, it is respectfully requested that the rejection of claims 21-39 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, be withdrawn.

Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the application by the current amendment. The attached page is captioned "Version with Markings to Show Changes Made."

In view of the above, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that this application be allowed and a Notice of Allowance issued. If the Examiner believes that a telephone conference with Applicant's attorneys would be advantageous to the disposition of this case, the Examiner is requested to telephone the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,


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TS:cm
Encl. (Version with Markings to Show Changes Made)

VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

IN THE CLAIMS:

The claims have been amended as follows:

21. (Amended) A method for cutting an indefinite length of suture to uniform lengths for subsequent threading and swaging to surgical needles having a suture receiving opening formed therein, comprising:

(a) feeding the indefinite length suture to a drawing axis of an apparatus for drawing and cutting thereof, said drawing axis being defined as being parallel to first and second longitudinal members of a drawing frame;

(b) heating a predetermined small length of the suture to stiffen the small length of suture after subsequent cooling thereof, in preparation for cutting the suture at the stiffened small length and inserting a stiffened lead cut end of the suture into an end of a needle for swaging thereto;

(c) gripping said indefinite length suture and alternately drawing it along said drawing axis by first and second gripping means, said first and second gripping means being mounted for reciprocal movement on [said] at least one of said first and second longitudinal [member] members, wherein one of said first and second gripping means draws the indefinite length suture to a position beyond said cutting means, while the other of said first and second gripping means reciprocates to a start position along said drawing axis before said cutting means, such that the first and second gripping means are used alternately to draw said indefinite length suture through the apparatus and to feed [the] said indefinite length suture into a needle;

(d) cutting said indefinite length suture to provide uniform lengths of suture;

(e) providing a predetermined long length of suture travel between the [tipping] heating step and the [cutter] cutting step, which is a discrete number, two or more, times the uniform length of suture being cut by the apparatus, to provide a discrete number, two or more, of apparatus cutting cycles between [tipping] heating of the suture and cutting of the suture, whereby after heating of a small length of suture, the suture is cooled to allow setting and hardening of the suture material prior to cutting.

23. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 22, including guiding the suture to the [tipping] heating step by at least one small diameter idler roller, and after heating thereat, drawing the suture around a large diameter idler roller, large relative to the diameter of the small diameter idler roller, which is provided because the small length of suture which has been heated [at the tipping means] has begun to harden and set by the time the heated suture reaches the large diameter idler roller, and the large diameter thereof facilitates the suture to travel therearound and change direction without picking up a permanent curve set from the large idler roller, to provide a straight suture, without any curve, when it is subsequently cut and inserted into a needle.

24. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 23, including [tipping] heating the suture near the top of the apparatus, and positioning the large diameter idler roller near the bottom of the apparatus, such that the suture reverses direction at the large diameter roller and is drawn vertically upwardly to the first and second gripping means.

26. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 21, including guiding the suture to the [tipping] heating step by at least one small diameter idler roller, and after heating thereat, drawing the suture around a large diameter idler roller, large relative to the diameter of the small diameter idler roller, which is provided because the small length of suture which has been heated [at the tipping means] has begun to harden and set by the time the heated suture reaches the large diameter idler roller, and the large diameter thereof facilitates the suture to travel therearound and change direction without picking up a permanent curve set from the large idler roller, to provide a straight suture, without any curve, when it is subsequently cut and inserted into a needle.

27. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 26, including [tipping] heating the suture near the top of the apparatus, and positioning the large diameter idler roller near the bottom of the apparatus, such that the suture reverses direction at the large diameter roller and is drawn vertically upwardly to the first and second gripping means.

31. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 30, wherein for each different position of the cutting step, the [tipping] heating is performed at a different predetermined position to precisely position the [tipped section] stiffened small length of suture at [the] a cutter means after said discrete number of apparatus cycles for cutting said indefinite length suture.

32. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 31, including positioning the [tipping] suture for heating [step] by positioning a pointer adjacent to a specified reading on a linear measurement scale stationarily positioned in the apparatus.

33. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 32, including positioning the [tipping] suture for heating [step] in the apparatus by rotating a handcrank and precision leadscrew.

34. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 30, including positioning the [tipping] suture for heating [step] by positioning a pointer adjacent to a specified reading in a linear measurement scale stationarily positioned in the apparatus.

35. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 30, including positioning the [tipping] suture for heating [step] in the apparatus by rotating a handcrank and precision leadscrew.

39. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 21, including positioning a releasable suture clamp on each of the first and second gripping means, and clamping the suture with [a] the releasable suture clamp during an initial auto threading of a new lead of suture through the apparatus.